



Wisconsin E-Brief for Partnership Schools

February 2011

An e-newsletter from the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Community Learning and Partnerships Team
to promote family-school-community partnerships for children's learning

Partnership News

Partnerships Help Families through Hard Economic Times

The difficult economy has made parent engagement in school a struggle for many families. Schools and libraries in Wisconsin and other states are responding in myriad ways. See below for ideas about how schools are creatively reaching out to economically-strapped families to keep learning – for children *and* parents -- at the forefront.

In Wisconsin

- VISTA volunteer Josh Cowles staffs an Opportunity Center at the Fond du Lac Public Library that **helps parents and students find money for college** and complete the FAFSA student aid application. Volunteers at the center also help job-seekers write resumes and cover letters, research employers, and with other job skills. Read more at <http://www.fdlpl.org/whatsnew.html#center>.
- VISTA volunteer Emily Minerath has organized **tax filing assistance sessions**, staffed by qualified volunteers, at the Madison Public Library. The VITA sessions (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) will run every Saturday from Jan. 29 through April 9. Learn more at <http://www.madisonpubliclibrary.org/calendar/tax.html>.
- Students and parents at Nuestro Mundo Community School, a dual-immersion school in Madison, **help prepare and serve a meal for the homeless** at a local community center. Students conduct a food drive to stock pantry shelves, make colorful decorations for the dining area, and sing songs for their guests. About 30 parent volunteers help plan and carry out the annual service project. Learn more at <http://dpi.wi.gov/fscp/pdf/PPP0910.pdf> (page 3).

Ideas from Other States

- Prompted by a parent survey, an Ohio school offers an **online GED course for parents** wanting to earn their high school diploma.
- A Kentucky elementary school that serves many children from low-income families offers **out-of-school enrichment clubs**, staffed by volunteers and funded by community partners, in areas such as drama, health, dance, and technology.
- Partnering with a nearby community college, a Washington, elementary school offers twice-weekly **English conversation classes at the school** to Spanish-speaking parents. Holding classes at the school their children attended helps parents feel more comfortable with the school and with learning, the principal said.
- See these and other ideas at <http://www.naesp.org/getting-parents-involved>.

Register Now!

Beyond Random Acts of Partnership: Building the Climate for Student Success will be held on Wednesday, March 23, at the Milwaukee Hilton City Center. Join parents, educators, and community leaders for a day of roundtables and conversation to learn and share best practices for creating schools that welcome all families and engage all students in learning.

Sponsored by Wisconsin PTA, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Wisconsin Education Association Council and Parents Plus. Supported by Wisconsin FACETS, Milwaukee Public Schools, and the School Districts of Kenosha, Beloit, and Racine. Register at <http://www.dpi.wi.gov/fscp/index.html>. For more information, contact Jane Grinde at DPI: jane.grinde@dpi.wi.gov or 608-266-9356.

Positive Partnership Practices

Get the Word Out to All Families, Not Just Meeting Attendees

In many schools, parents who can't get to a school meeting never hear what happened. In its 2010 School Update, NNPS reported that 27% of schools said they fail to get information from workshops and meetings to families who couldn't attend.

What are some ways for schools to get "a bigger bang for their buck" by getting the message out to many more families than were able to attend a gathering? A few ideas follow:

- Ask a student, parent, staff member or Partnership Action Team member to attend the meeting and take notes.
- Summarize major points in easy-to-read dot point format. Be sure to mention any "next steps," or recommendations for action.
- Publish the summary in the school newsletter, on the school website, in parent group notes or blogs and other venues.
- Record a brief message for the school telephone line so callers hear the information.
- Ask the local newspaper to send a reporter to the meeting or to feature the dot point summary in space reserved for school news.
- Ask the local cable TV channel to tape and air the session.
- Post meeting summaries in places where parents gather, such as at school doorways, or ask volunteers to hand out meeting results to parents as they drop off or pick up students.
- Translate proceedings in families' languages.
- Invite families to offer their comments, ideas, and questions either via e-mail, strategically-placed suggestion boxes, or by phone.

Investing a little time and energy in providing families who couldn't attend a meeting with a chance to hear about good parenting practices or new school issues will go a long way to increasing the engagement of all families in your school.

New Partnership Model

Academic Parent Teacher Teams

A new model that organizes parent engagement around student academic data is attracting national attention and resulting in positive outcomes. Maria Paredes, director of community education at Creighton School District in Arizona, has developed the model, called the Academic Parent Teacher Team (APTT). The model replaces traditional parent-teacher conferences with three group meetings throughout the year, where teachers meet at once with all parents in their classroom.

Each parent receives a folder of their child's performance indicators. Teachers then conduct an in-depth coaching session on how to interpret this data based on overall classroom performance, school benchmarks, and state standards. Parents practice strategies to help support learning at home. And together, parents and teachers set goals for students, individually and as a class.

Read more at <http://www.hfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/academic-parent-teacher-teams-reorganizing-parent-teacher-conferences-around-data>.

Resources for Family Engagement

Make Literacy a Family Affair. The *Opening the Door to Learning* guide, published online in nine languages, can help families develop children's literacy skills PreK-12, understand what children will learn in school, and know how to support literacy learning. Visit:

http://www.newvisions.org/sites/default/files/publications/FLG08_English_0.pdf

Start a school garden! The Got Dirt? Gardening Initiative trains teachers and childcare providers to start and maintain youth and school gardens. School gardens create an active learning environment and increase children's knowledge and consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables.

http://www.co.brown.wi.us/departments/page_5ddf83a298e6/?department=68d3c3d55278&subdepartment=b2b33ee26bfc

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The ***Wisconsin E-Brief for Partnership Schools*** is a monthly newsletter of news, events, research, and promising practices to keep your school, district, or organization focused and moving forward on family-school-community partnerships for children's learning. You are receiving this e-brief because of your involvement in a partnership-related event or initiative sponsored by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI). *If you prefer NOT to receive this online newsletter, please reply to this email with the subject line: "Remove from list."*

Your comments, ideas, and stories are vital to this newsletter. Please tell us your achievements in promoting children's learning with families and community members, as well as your challenges and questions. Partnership practitioners learn most from each other, so ***let's hear from you!***